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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: enhanced participation of women in development: an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the fields of education, health and work

Statement submitted by Soroptomist International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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* E/CN.6/2006/1.

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Statement

Women and girls in development: freedom from violence

Soroptimist International believes that violence of any kind is intolerable. In particular, Soroptimist International condemns the use and/or threat of all violence against women in the home, at work, in the community or in war. Acts of violence endanger women physically, mentally, emotionally and economically; perpetuating and reinforcing unjustifiable inequalities in all aspects of women's lives.

Soroptimist International supports the strategic objectives stated in the Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and reconfirmed at the 2005 Commission on the Status of Women and the Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Furthermore, Soroptimist International argues that achievement of gender equality and the Millennium Development Goals is difficult without ending all forms of violence against women and girls. Soroptimist International urges governments to do their utmost to secure the safety of girls and women from acts of violence and to help them overcome the consequences when violence does occur, and to:

- Ensure that law enforcement has adequate resources and training to respond to violence against women and girls; responds quickly to incidents of violence with compassion, understanding and respect; and patrols public places and streets.
- Provide timely and effective resources and support services to victims of violence including safe shelter; access to legal services; and medical and psychological treatment without cost to the victim.
- Provide special services to migrant, disabled and indigenous victims of violence. For example, translation services or disabled access to shelters.
- Inform women and the public at large about the legal rights of women and victims and sources of help.

Soroptimist International also urges Governments to take further action designed to overcome the possibility of and/or the effects of violence by:

- Protecting women from violence and exploitation in their home, community and the workplace.
- Ensuring the safety of those using public transportation.
- Promoting penal systems that protect citizens from violence and punish perpetrators
- Offering services to educate and counsel perpetrators
- Introducing and enforcing legislation making religious and traditional practices which harm women and girls illegal, including female genital mutilation, crimes of honour, bride burning, underage marriages and forced abortion
- Ensuring that women in prison or other institutions are afforded their human rights, protected from violence and treated with dignity and respect.
- Providing rehabilitation for victims of violence including training and job finding when appropriate
- Creating or strengthening the mechanisms for women and girls to report acts of violence in a safe and confidential environment
- Supporting gender specific research into the causes and best practices in addressing violent behavior; disseminating the results and acting on the recommendations
- Developing education programs for young people to teach about gender equality, non-violent conflict resolution and healthy relationships
- Raising awareness about and legislating for the media to promote non-stereotyped images of women and men and eliminate programming that sexualizes girls and promotes violence against women.
- Including women who have suffered from violence in all program development and implementation.

Soroptimist International works to prevent and reduce violence against women and to help the victims, and advocates co-operation among governments, non-governmental and voluntary organizations in this work.